

“The Indispensable Tiger”

A powerful old tiger, the leader of the pack, was preparing to go on a hunt. Gathering the other tigers about him, he said, "We must go out in the plains and hunt, for the winter is coming. You young fellows come with me; perhaps you will learn a thing or two."

The young tigers were pleased to hear this, for the old fellow had hitherto shown no interest in tiger development. He usually left them behind when he went hunting and they were tired of doing nothing but keeping order among the cubs and performing other routine tasks.

The first day out, the old tiger spotted a herd of elephants. "Here's your chance, Bernard," he said to one of the younger tigers. "Look at it as a challenge." But Bernard had no idea how to go about hunting. With a roar he rushed at the elephants who just ran off in all directions. "It looks as though I'll have to do the job myself," said the leader philosophically. And so he did.

The next day, the tigers came upon a herd of water buffalo. "Suppose you take over now, Jerome," said the old tiger. Jerome, reluctant to ask silly questions but determined to do his best, crept up on the grazing buffalo. He leaped straight at the largest of them, but the big buffalo tossed him to the ground and Jerome was lucky to escape in one piece. Mortified, he crept back to the group. "No, no, no, NO!" said the old tiger. "What's happening around here? Where is the performance I'm looking for?" "But you never taught us how to do it!" cried one of the young tigers. The old tiger was in no mood to listen. "The rest of you stay where you are," he growled, "and I will do the job myself." And so he did.

"I can see," said the old tiger as the others gathered admiringly about him, "that none of you is yet ready to take my place." He sighed, "much as I hate to say it, I seem to be indispensable."

Time brought little change. The old tiger sometimes took the younger ones along with him on hunts, and occasionally he let one of them try to make a kill. But having received no instruction, they were unequal to the task. And the old tiger still made no effort to teach the others his tricks! He had forgotten that he himself was a product of tiger-to-tiger coaching.

One day, when he had grown quite old, the tiger met a friend, a wise lion he had known for years. Before long, the tiger was launched on his favorite topic of conversation: the lack of initiative in the younger generation.

"Would you believe it?" he asked the lion. "Here I am getting a bit long in the tooth, and I still have to do all the hunting for my pack. There seems to be no one of my stripe around." "That's odd," said the lion. "I find the younger lions in my pride take well to instruction. Some of them are carrying a good bit of responsibility. In fact," he continued, "I'm thinking about retiring completely next year and letting the younger fellows take over."

"I envy you," said the tiger. "I'd take things easier and relax myself, if only I had a little leadership material around me!" The old tiger sighed and shook his head. "You can't imagine," he said, "what a burden it is to be indispensable!!"